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Three Specialists to Join Cornell's Enology and Viticulture Program

By Timothy P. Krakowiak

ITHACA, N.Y. - Cornell University's three-year-old Enology and Viticulture Program, the only such undergraduate major offered in the Eastern United States, is gaining three new faculty members. New York's \$3.5 billion wine and grape industries will be the ultimate beneficiaries of their added expertise.

Enologists Ramón Mira de Orduña Heidinger, associate professor, and Gavin Sacks, assistant professor, will be based in the Department of Food Science and Technology come January. Justine Vanden Heuvel, assistant professor of viticulture, joined the Department of Horticultural Sciences this month. In addition to conducting research at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) in Geneva, all three will teach undergraduates on the Ithaca campus.

"We are delighted that Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences will be adding three new people to its viticulture and winemaking team, which is vital to the continued success of the New York grape and wine industry," said Jim Trezise, president of the New York Wine and Grape Foundation. "The creation of a new undergraduate enology and viticulture program is truly exciting in terms of educating and training tomorrow's leaders in the grape and wine industry, and Dean Susan Henry deserves tremendous credit for her commitment and leadership in making it happen."

Ramón Mira de Orduña Heidinger, wine microbiologist

Ramón Mira de Orduña Heidinger earned B.S. and M.S. degrees in biology from the University of Tübingen in Germany and a Ph.D. in microbiology from Massey University in New Zealand. He then moved to Canada, serving first as a postdoctoral fellow at the Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute of Brock University and then as an assistant professor of food science at the University of Guelph. Raised at the northern edge of Germany's Black Forest, Mira de Orduña is fluent in German, Spanish, French and English and reads Portuguese, Italian and Catalan. "I am looking forward to teaching some of the brightest students in America in my chosen discipline," he said. "I am also eager to start collaborating with the other new enology professor and existing faculty members at the department on projects in and around wine."

"Dr. Mira de Orduña's balanced research experience in basic and applied fields, such as the study of yeast and bacteria interactions, bacterial nutrition and the metabolism of several compounds relevant to wine quality and aroma, will have a major impact on quality in the New York wine industry," said Chang Yong "Cy" Lee, chair of Food Science and Technology in Geneva.

Gavin Sacks, wine chemist

Gavin Sacks was educated in chemistry, receiving his B.S. from the University of Virginia and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from Cornell. He remained at Cornell as a postdoctoral fellow in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences and is currently a research associate in the Division of Nutritional

Pictures are linked to hi-res scans



Ramón Mira de Orduña Heidinger



Gavin Sacks

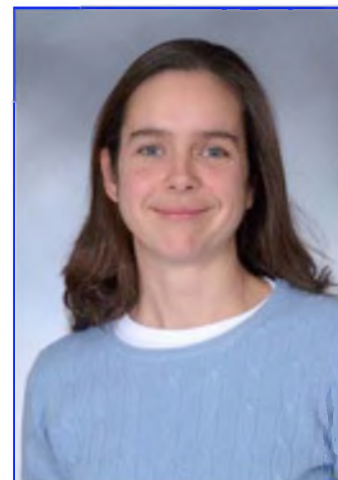
Sciences. In his new position, his research will focus initially on managing methoxy pyrazine levels, which can be higher in cool-climate grapes. He will teach an undergraduate course on wine and grape flavor development.

"Finger Lakes growers and winemakers are very adventuresome and curious, and there is a recognition that this region will only improve in both quality and prestige in coming years," said Sacks, adding that he is excited to join the program while the local fine wine industry is still relatively young.

"Dr. Sacks brings an in-depth knowledge of analytical chemistry for identifying the chemical make-up of various compounds associated with desirable and undesirable qualities in wine and other beverages," said Lee. "He will be able to identify the biochemical mechanisms of specific aroma compounds in wine so that he can help the New York wine industry produce value-added, premium-quality wine year after year."

Justine Vanden Heuvel, viticulturist

Justine Vanden Heuvel completed her education at the University of Guelph, including a B.S. in horticultural science and business and an M.S. and a Ph.D. in plant agriculture. Since 2002 her research as an extension assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst focused on optimizing yield fruit composition in cranberry. Additionally, she conducted studies in Southern New England commercial vineyards.



Justine Vanden Heuvel

"Dr. Vanden Heuvel demonstrates an excellent combination of broad experience in viticulture and an engaging teaching style. Her research focus on viticulture effects on fruit and wine composition and quality, her experience as a faculty member at UMass Amherst and her collegiality were also very attractive to our Cornell grape and wine team," said viticulture search committee chair Alan Lakso, a professor of grape physiology. Vanden Heuvel will assume leadership of the two vineyard management courses that Lakso has been teaching.

Enologist search planned

A search will soon be underway for the position being vacated by Thomas Henick-Kling, who has directed wine research and extension at Cornell since 1987. In January he will begin a new position as director of the National Wine and Grape Industry Centre at Charles Sturt University in South Wales, Australia.

"The new enology and viticulture undergraduate program at Cornell is well set to deliver an outstanding education for our students," remarked Henick-Kling. "Interest among students is high, and the wine industry in New York and in the rest of the U.S. is eagerly awaiting the graduates from the new program. I think the focus of the research and extension program on wine quality has been a key factor in the success of the New York wine industry in producing wines that can compete with the best wines in the world."

Horticulturists at the NYSAES have conducted viticultural research since the 1880s. They have released 56 varieties of juice, table and wine grapes, starting with Goff in 1906 and including the debut last July of three wine grapes, Noiret, Corot noir and Valvin Muscat.

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Related World Wide Web sites:

<http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/grapesandwine/>

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